

COBBETT'S WEEKLY POLITICAL REGISTER.

355] LONDON, SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 1818.

[356]

ON THE

ABSOLUTE SWAY
OF THE
GREAT SEAT OWNERS

OVER

KING, MINISTERS, AND PEOPLE.

I have, since I have been acquainted with the real situation of the Royal Family, often laughed at the old story about "an *influence behind the throne* greater than the throne itself." This is one of the numerous cheats that have been practised upon the world. What *influence* could there be of any practical consequence? — *Charles Jenkinson*, who was afterwards *Lord Hawkesbury* and *Earl of Liverpool*, and whose son is *Earl of Liverpool* now, was looked upon as one of the *influencing* persons. As if this man, who was once a *Page* to the king's father, could have any weight in dictating measures, to which the *Borough-mongers* had been opposed! as if he and *Lord Bute*, and three or four other contemptible people, could have supported the king against old *Lord Chatham*, if the men who had three votes out of every four had not been on the

same side! The rejection of "Catholic Emancipation" was attributed to the "conscientious scruples" of the king. The poor old man had no more to do with it than had any one of the little land turtles in the American woods.

The Emancipation would have opened the places of Judge, Chancellor, Attorney, and Solicitor-General, Master of the Rolls, Privy Counsellor, Field and General Officer, Captain and Admiral, and of Parliament-men, and Sixty Peers, to *Catholics*. Was it likely, that those who had all these in their own hands, should call in more persons to share in the rich spoils? Is it usual for men to act thus? Ireland is one of the *estates* of the *Borough-mongers*; and do men ever call in other men to participate in their rents?

Mr. Fox and his party, who brought forward this measure in 1807, stood *pledged*, however, to the *Catholics*. They had given the pledge when they were out of place, and, most likely, when they never expected to get in. But, still, it is surprizing that they should have attempted the fulfilment, knowing, as they did, the all-ruling power that was

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naturally opposed to it. The truth is, they were deceived. Some seat-owners *appeared to acquiesce*; and the ministers, who were, in the arts of the trade, not half so deep as their opponents, thought that, if they carried their measure, they should have the Catholic Peers and Commoners with them; and should thus acquire permanent strength. The Boroughmongers took the alarm. Lords E—n and H—y, (now L—l) and P—l, were dispatched to the King, who was told that he was about to act “in violation of his *Coronation Oath*,” and that he *must turn out the ministers*.

The Foxites finding themselves undermined, endeavoured to keep their places by *withdrawing the Emancipation Bill* from the Table of the House of Commons, on which it was laid, and in which House it had been read a first time. But, it was now too late. The Boroughmongers could not trust them; and out they were driven. That the king was a *mere instrument* on the occasion is certain; else how came he to *approve of the Bill* before it was introduced? How came he first to do this, and then, all of a sudden, to turn out his ministers for having proposed the measure? Nay, how came he to put them out, even after they had withdrawn the Bill? If I am asked why the Boroughmongers did not *vote out the Bill and the Ministers*,

I answer, that that would have been to expose themselves to great odium, especially in Ireland, every impartial man being for the measure. It was, therefore, much better to throw the failure of it upon the “*tender conscience* of the “king.” And to set up all through England a tremendous cry of, “God bless the king, and “*No Popery*,” which the new minister did, and with such success, that when Mr. Roscoz offered himself to be re-elected, the people of his own town, where his talents and his virtues were so well known, almost buried him with dirt and stones, amidst shouts of “Down with the *Pope*;” and that, too, as the event has proved, while they were paying loads of taxes to restore the *Pope* and the Inquisition.

But, if those who really knew any thing of the matter, could have had any doubt upon this subject in 1807, the events of 1811 and 1812 would have completely removed such doubt; for the king was then shut up; his son was, in fact, put in his place. The king’s *conscience*, therefore, was no longer an obstacle. The Prince Regent stood pledged to the Catholics, both verbally and in writing. Yet he did not attempt to redeem the pledge. Suppose him, if you like, a *faithless man*; but faithless men do not, any more than others, *voluntarily* and *gratuitously* expose themselves to the hatred and *contempt* of man.

kind. At first, he had only *limited powers*. The Boroughmongers actually *openly kept a part of the very exterior of royalty in their own hands*. But, at the end of a certain time, they enlarged his powers. To this time his old friends and companions looked with eagerness. The Catholics thought, to be sure, that they should *now* get their long-sought emancipation.

All London heard the execrations that were, upon this occasion, poured out upon the Prince. He was called every thing descriptive of baseness and perfidy; when he really had no more power with respect to Catholic Emancipation than I had. He might be perfectly sincere, when he pledged himself to the Catholics; nor is there any good reason to suppose that he was not sincere. As Duke of Cornwall he owns *two seats* in that County. His two members voted for the Emancipation. Even Castlereagh, to make good *his* pledge, was suffered to vote for it, in 1812. But, when there appeared so large a majority against it, was it not then become clear, that the *conscience* of the King had been a mere *pretext*? Could any man, however stupid, still be deluded by so stale a trick? What miserable nonsense it is, then, to talk of "an influence *behind the throne* greater than the *throne itself*!" Will any body believe, that any favourites of the Prince could have

persuaded him to falsify his word? Why should they? His favourites had been Lord Holland, Mr. Tierney, Mr. Sheridan, and, generally, the friends of Catholic Emancipation. He had supposed that some *real power* would come into his hands, when he should be King; but he soon found his mistake; he found himself to be a mere tool in the hands of the owners of the seats in parliament; namely, about 120 Boroughmongers, who have, at all times, a dead majority; and who, though they very willingly would permit the Prince to do such odious things as the creating of Bate Dudley a Baronet, and would be glad to see him disgrace himself by amours, excesses, and squanderings, take special care that he shall do nothing that shall trench upon their real and solid dominion.

Of the real nothingness of the King and the people called *his* ministers there were ample proofs in the history of Pitt. It is very well known that Pitt, who had formed to himself a hope of immortal fame from his financial schemes, went with extreme reluctance into the war with France in 1793. The account of the conversation between him and Mr. MARET, which was published in the Annual Register, from a translation of Mr. MARET's notes, proves, that the minister, who was thought to rule in England, was in great fear, lest the French Convention should, by their violence, give a handle to

the Aristocracy here to force him into the war. His chief *reliance* was upon the *Opposition*, which was then formidable. He hoped that the great seat-owners, who belonged to that Body, and who had so long affected to follow Mr. Fox, would *continue firmly united against his ministry*; in which case, he could have resisted the warlike commands of his own masters, that is to say, the Boroughmongers on his side. But, his hopes were disappointed. It has been a thousand times stated, that the *Court Influence* drove him into the war. That the king told him “War, or “turn out.” This was, indeed, the alternative; but, the *source of the command* was different; and, upon this occasion, it was *openly seen to be so*.

A great body of the Boroughmongers, who had, until now, been in the opposition, finding that the example of France might produce Reform in England, the necessity of which Reform, by the by, was most ably urged by men of great talent and weight, resolved to have for minister some man that should go to war with France. They found that Mr. Fox would not; and, after due preparations, over they came to Pitt, who would rather have had the company of Satan himself. Amongst the leaders of the seceders from Mr. Fox were the Duke of Portland, Lord Fitzwilliam, and Lord Spencer, each of whom had ten times the influence

of Pitt himself. BURKE, who had been the trumpeter of the war, and who had been for two years labouring to work people’s minds up to it, was a mere tool in the hands of Earl FITZWILLIAM, in one of whose seats he sat. He belied his conscience through the whole of his work; but, he received, not only his seat, but his very *bread*, at the hands of this opulent nobleman, who was bent upon preserving his *borough powers*, or, at least, to take the chances of war for that preservation.

How amusing it is to hear the world disputing and wrangling about the motives, and principles, and opinions of *Burke*! He had no notions, no principles, no opinions of his own when he wrote his famous work, which tended so much to kindle the flames of that bloody war, which, in its ramifications, have reached even to the Canadian Lakes and the Mexican Gulf. He was a poor, needy dependent of a Boroughmonger, to serve whom, and please whom, he wrote; and for no other purpose whatever. And yet, how many people read this man’s writings as if they had flowed from his *own mind*; and who seem to regard even the pension, which Lord Fitzwilliam soon after the change procured for him and for his widow after him, as no more than the proper and natural reward for his great and *disinterested* literary exertions in the cause of “social “order”!

[362] From this account of the real cause of the war of 1793, it is clear how the world, in general, have been deceived as to the King's commands upon that occasion. He, it is probable, wished for war. It was the cause of Kings and Electors as well as of Boroughmongers. But, his mere wishes were unsupported by any power of his own. And as to PITT, if he had taken his place with FOX on the Opposition benches, he would have found, as he afterwards did, when he opposed his own understrapper, ADDINGTON, that out of his majority of four hundred and thirty votes, not more than thirty-seven would have gone over with him.

In 1801 Pitt resigned, because Catholic Emancipation was not permitted to be brought forward. But, when the Boroughmongers, in 1804, found, upon the renewal of the war, that Addington was insufficient for the purpose, they recalled Pitt, who, however, in spite of all his pledges, never dared to talk of Catholic Emancipation again, to the day of his death. Upon the occasion of this last change, it is notorious, that the king discovered his reluctance in all possible ways; and when it actually took place, he fell into a fit of insanity. He personally liked Addington, who is a smooth and accommodating creature. His father was a mad-doctor, had treated the king with great tenderness, while others used harsh, not to say cruel, remedies. Addington, who had

always been an underling, behaved in a manner which the king and queen and royal family liked very much; and, besides, he did all they wanted in the way of pensions and places for their personal friends. So that the life they led with him was perfect Elysium, compared with what they were obliged to endure from the neglect and insolence of Pitt, who was domineering towards every living creature, the Boroughmongers excepted. But, the war was again begun. Addington was thought by the seat-owners, unfit for their purpose; both sides of the House joined to put him out; and, a very little after he had left Pitt in a minority of thirty-seven, Pitt saw him (the Members being all the same persons) in a minority of about the same number! Where was now that "*influence behind the throne, greater than the throne itself?*" What was become of it upon this memorable occasion? The truth was, that Pitt was thought, by those who had the real power in their hands, the fittest man to carry on the complicated machine; and, no sooner had they made up their minds, than they put out the poor thing who had filled his place for a couple of years, *keeping in almost all the rest of the ministry.*

PITT was Minister till January 1806, when he died; but he was not that Mr. Pitt whose honesty and disinterestedness nobody had before ever called in question.

Until the discoveries were made with regard to old Lord Melville, he had always contrived to throw off from himself the charge of giving the public money in exchange for votes. But when it was discovered that he really had been *privy* to Dundas's transactions; that he had made false loans, and given the profits of them to persons who had hired seats to procure him votes; when he stood convicted before the public as a peculator, and was compelled to resort to a bill of *indemnity*, which, in such a case, could be regarded in no other light than as a *pardon*; when he got into this state, people ceased to speak of him as they formerly had spoken. Members, who had for years, looked up to him as a sort of superior being, now treated him as an equal; and, frequently, with something bordering on contempt. I remember Dr. Lawrence coming into my house (which was then near the Houses of Parliament) one night as he was going home. "Well!" exclaimed he, "miracles have not ceased, say what they will! "Never did I expect to live to hear what I have heard this night!" Upon enquiry, I found that Sir WILLIAM ELFORD had been *schooling Pitt*; had been "advising him to be more guarded in his expressions." "And what did Pitt say," said I. "Oh!" replied the Doctor, "he said nothing, but he gave him a look that seemed to

"say, thou base and stupid reptile, "is there no hell to shelter me from the shame of listening to thy advice!"

What a sort of a man this Sir WILLIAM ELFORD was; what a tool he had been of Pitt, who made him a Baronet, the reader will guess, perhaps, from the following anecdote. In 1800, Sir FRANCIS BURDETT had brought before Parliament some charges of cruelty against one ARIS, who was the keeper of a *Bastile*, which the Ministry used during the suspension of the Habeas Corpus. ELEFTORD, in order, as he thought, to gratify Pitt, moved that the *Governor* (as he called Aris) should come to the Bar of the House, and there disprove the assertions of Sir Francis. The latter instantly rose and *seconded* the motion, observing, that, hardened as Aris was, there was something in guilt which could never look truth in the face. Pitt, who perceived that the officiousness of Elford would lead to the detection of the cruelties of himself and the Secretary of State, by enabling Sir Francis to question and cross-question their jailor before the House, whispered one of the Secretaries of the Treasury, to get up and "recommend to his honourable friend, Elford, to withdraw his motion," which the latter instantly assented to. But, the consent of Sir Francis Burdett, as *seconder*, was to be obtained to this; and, Sir Francis

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refused to suffer the motion to be withdrawn. The Speaker was then obliged to put the question: the house divided; and Elford *actually voted against his own motion!*

Such was the man who afterwards took upon him to *school* Mr. Pitt! The latter appears to have felt this change proceeding from his loss of character; and, it is the best thing that can be said of him, that, in all probability, it tended to shorten his days. Such a man as Dundas might be dismissed from the Privy Council; might be tried for peculation; might be cleared by a *bare majority* of the House of Lords, and by the vote of such people as the Dukes of Athol and York; might refuse to answer questions "lest the answer should criminate himself;" such a man might live after all this, and even show himself in parliament, as Melville did. But, Mr. Pitt had had a *character* greater than that of almost any man that ever existed. There was a time when he was really *beloved* by all the sensible and worthy part of the nation. He remembered that time, and though the miscreants, who had dragged him, step by step, into all sorts of evil deeds, cared about nothing but place and pelf; though they were quite as happy as ever in the possession of power in 1805, *he* felt how he had fallen; he felt what it was to have exchanged the friendship, the sincere

friendship of the independent gentlemen of England, for that of such men as Jenkinson, Dundas, Rose, Castlereagh, Canning, Huskisson, and that set of prostituted lawyers, by whom he was, at last, surrounded, and, indeed, guided. He saw that ADDINGTON, a man, who, bred to the bar, had never had a two guinea fee in his life; a man destitute of all talent; a man whose emptiness, whose pompous vanity, were a standing jest; a man so completely the creature of Pitt, that when Sheridan called him his *sitting part*, left behind him upon the Treasury Bench, every one acknowledged the aptness and the justice of the figure: Mr. Pitt saw, that even this man, this servile courtier, had supplanted him in the esteem of great numbers of virtuous, though deceived people. It was impossible for him to bear his existence under such a change; and, he certainly fell a victim to his mortification: an awful warning to every man of talent, into whose mind shall intrude the thought of gaining or retaining power by the means of corruption.

Much has been said and written on the comparative talents of Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox; but, in truth, as to the talent of *oratory*, there is no comparison to be made between Mr. Pitt and *any* other man in England. He was a shallow politician; his schemes of finance were hatched at the Bank, and were merely dressed out with his

eloquence; he understood very little of the causes of national happiness and misery, of national strength and national feebleness. But, as an orator, as a debater, he surpassed *all* other men so as to leave no room for comparison at all. No man can read a book with less hesitation and with more fluency than he spoke. He never referred to any notes or any paper. If he had to answer five or six persons, he missed not one single point in either of their speeches; if there was a possibility of turning any argument of his opponents to his own advantage, he never missed to do it; and he discovered, at a single glance, and carried along in his memory, vulnerable points which common men would never have been able to perceive. In cases where he was attacked by undeniable and striking facts, he watched for the *wanderings* of his assailants, seized hold of some weak part of a digression, (even though but a parenthesis,) and, before he ended, his hearers nearly forgot the question at issue. So that the real power of his speeches, leaving the other motives of the hearers aside, was very great. And, then, the correctness with which he spoke; the elegant language, and the caution. Mr. WYNDHAM said of him to me, that "it only belonged to Mr. Pitt to speak a King's 'Speech off hand.'" He could unite the highest pitch of vehemence of language and manner

with the utmost degree of correctness and caution.

It is impossible for any man of any country, not to lament that such intellectual powers should have been perverted; and to Englishmen, who love their country, it is a subject of unparalleled sorrow as well as shame. In the year 1793, it was in Mr. Pitt's power to have secured the liberty of all Europe. If he had boldly rejected the commands of the Boroughmongers to go to war; if he had resigned, and called upon the people to join him in demanding a Reform in the House of Commons; if he had done this, there would have been a speedy end to all corruptions; there would have been no war against France; all the despotisms of the Continent would have been dissolved; England would have remained free and happy; and he would have lived to the latest posterity in the hearts of a great and grateful nation, and have been held in admiration throughout the whole world. But, in evil hour, yielding to the advice and importunities of the dirty slaves by whom he was surrounded, he chose himself to act the part of a slave to the Boroughmongers. He said, in a speech in Parliament, in 1780, that "without a reform in Parliament, it was impossible for any honest man to remain a Minister in England"; and he now, in his own person, gave a complete proof of

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the truth of this his former assertion. He not only set his face against reform; he not only plunged the nation into war to prevent reform; but he became a bitter persecutor of reformers, and, with his tool Sir John Scott, and urged on by the counsel of Burke, he actually endeavoured to pursue even to *death*, Mr. HORNE TOOKE, with whom he had formerly been associated to procure that very Reform, the persevering in which cause *alone* was the offence of Mr. Tooke, as was declared by the Judge (Eyre) who presided at the trial; and on which trial, being summoned as a witness by Mr. Tooke, Mr. Pitt was guilty of what I cannot, as ascribed to such a man, find the heart to name.

The acts of injustice, oppression, and cruelty, which were perpetrated under him from 1793 to 1800; and the gross and outrageous acts of corruption in 1804 and 1805, though the nation, in the midst of false alarms and hostile passions, appeared not to heed them, did leave a deep impression upon the minds of the people in general, and the *exposures* of the latter years completed the destruction of a character which, at one time, seemed to be a great national possession. Mr. PITTS entered public life with all possible advantages. His father had left him a great stock of reputation; the father was still surpassed in talent by the son. All good men were prepared beforehand to love him.

He came into power after a disastrous war. The great prosperity, which the industry and energy of the nation soon re-produced, was ascribed to him by the people in general. His youth, his person, his known disdain of all honorable men at the outset; all were in his favour. There was hardly an independent gentleman in England, who, at one time, had not a sincere personal regard for him; and (Truth in tears records the fact) he died with Jenkinson, Dundas, Castlereagh, and Canning for friends, and with George Rose to close his eyes.—George Rose's account of the close of Mr. Pitt's life was the subject of *ridicule*; when there was a time that Mr. Pitt's knell would have sunk the hearts in the bodies of ninety-nine hundredths of the people.

The digression, into which I have been led, has robbed me of almost all my room, but it appeared to me necessary: for, a vile hireling, who has written what he calls *a life of Mr. Pitt*, never knew any thing about the matter, except what swam upon the surface; and, if he had known, his business was to disguise the truth.

When the present cabinet was formed, the Earl of Lonsdale, who owns nine seats, had made it a point that Lord Mulgrave should be Master-General of the Ordnance. It being found difficult to comply with this request without clashing in another quarter, the

Earl of Lonsdale was informed, that His Royal Highness the Prince Regent had *been pleased to make an arrangement* by which Lord Mulgrave would have a very lucrative post *out* of the Cabinet, sensible men, most likely, not wishing to have him *in* the Cabinet. Upon receiving this information by letter, at one of his country seats, it is said that Lord Lonsdale exclaimed: “*His Royal Highness has been pleased, has he! Bring me my boots!*” Whether this be true or not, it is very certain that he undid the arrangement, and that he put Lord Mulgrave into the Ordnance and the Cabinet. In fact, it is notorious, that the Prince has no power at all of any consequence; that he cannot procure the appointment to any office of considerable trust or emolument; that it is not *he* that chooses Ministers, Ambassadors, Judges, Commanders, or Governors; that it is not *he* who grants pensions, or bestows sinecures; that it is not *he* who gives to the Deans and Chapters *leave to elect* Bishops any more than it is the “*Holy Ghost*” that inspires the said Deans and Chapters upon the occasions when these at once impious and farcical scenes are exhibited. Of all the *elections*, that ever the world heard of, these are the most curious.

When a Bishop dies, another must be put in his place. The Bishop is elected by the Dean and Prebends of the Cathedral Church

of the Diocese. The king, who is called the *head of the Church*, sends these gentlemen who are called the Dean and Chapter, a *congé d'elire*, or a *leave to elect*; but he sends them, at the same time, the *name of the man*, whom, and whom only, they are to elect. With this name in their possession, away they go into the Cathedral, chant psalms and anthems, and then, in a set form of words, *invoke the Holy Ghost to assist them in their choice*. After these invocations, they, by a series of good luck, wholly without a parallel, always find that the dictates of the Holy Ghost agree with the *recommendation* of the king. And, now, if any man can, in the annals of the whole world, find me a match for this mockery, let him produce it. But even this shockingly impious farce loses part of its qualities, unless we bear in mind, that it is not the *king*, but some Boroughmonger, in virtue of some bargain for votes, who has really nominated the Bishop; and, that the King, the Minister, the Dean and Chapter, and the name of the Holy Ghost, are neither more nor less than so many tools in the hands of the said Boroughmonger.

It makes me, and hundreds besides me, laugh to read, in American and French publications, remarks on the men engaged in carrying on this curious government of ours. We laugh at the idea of the “*influence of the*

"Crown;" of the party of Pitt; of the party of Fox; of the intrigues of this Minister, of the powerful eloquence of that Minister; of those great men, the Wellesleys, and Liverpools, and Castlereaghs, and Cannings, on the one side; and the Tierneys, and Horners, and Broughams, and God knows who, on the other side; and the Thorntons, Wilberforces and Bankses, and the rest of that canting crew in the middle. We know them all; yea, *one and all*, to be the mere tools of the Boroughmongers; and that, as to the *deciding of any question*, affecting the honour, liberty, or happiness of the country, the Duke of Newcastle, who was, only a few years ago, a baby in his cradle, had, even while he was living upon pap, more power than this whole rabble of great senators all put together; and, dare say, now that he is grown up to be a man, he pays much more attention to the voice of his fox-hounds than to the harangues of these bawlers, and that he has more respect for the persons and motives of the former than for those of the latter.

Some of the "Royal Dukes" gain a little popular favour, by running about to Bible Societies, Lancaster Schools, and sometimes to societies for assisting *lying-in women*, and to the most celebrated Methodist Meeting Houses, when my thundering preacher holds forth on a popular occasion. Their

names are in all great subscription lists; and they make speeches on many of these occasions, and always give away some of their money. All this only exposes them to the ridicule of the Boroughmongers, who make no such sacrifices. They are at their great country seats with their packs of hounds and troops of hunters, and with their good cheer for their numerous guests. Not a single country seat has the Royal Family; not an acre of land, not a pack of hounds, except the stag-hounds kept up *for the use of the old king!* The kings of England had, formerly, *immense landed estates*. They lived upon these estates. They wanted no *public money*, except for purposes of war, and sometimes they carried on war out of their own purses. The Boroughmongers took all these estates away from the present Family, in the early part of this King's reign; they have divided the greater part of them amongst themselves, and settled a *pension*, or, what they call a *Civil List*, on the King in lieu of them, thus exposing him and his family to all the odium that the annual exhibition of a great *charge upon the public* naturally excites and keeps alive. With what truth the story is told of the poor old King's expressing his resolution, upon one occasion, to *go off to Hanover*, I do not know; but really one can easily believe, that a man would almost go any where, and live almost any

how, or with almost any body, to get out of such a state of nominal majesty, and of real bondage.

After this view of the situation of this family, how we must laugh at De Lolme's pretty account of the *English Constitution*. After seeing that about three or four hundred Boroughmongers actually possess all the legislative power, divide the ecclesiastical, judicial, military, and naval departments amongst their own dependents, what a fine picture we find of that wise system of *checks and balances*, of which so much has been said by many great writers! What name to give to such a government it is difficult to say. It is like nothing that ever was heard of before. It is neither a monarchy, an aristocracy, nor a democracy; it is a band of great nobles, who, by sham elections, and by the means of all sorts of bribery and corruption, have obtained an absolute sway in the country, having under them, for the purposes of show and of execution, a

thing they call a King, sharp and unprincipled fellows whom they call Ministers, a mummery which they call a Church, experienced and well-tried and steel hearted men whom they call Judges, a company of false money-makers, whom they call a Bank, numerous bands of brave and needy persons whom they call soldiers and sailors; and a talking, corrupt, and impudent set, whom they call a House of Commons. Such is the government of England; such is the *thing* which has been able to bribe one half of Europe to oppress the other half; such is the famous “Bulwark of religion and social order,” which has surrounded itself with a permanent standing army of more than a hundred thousand men, and very wisely, for without such an army it could not exist a month.

W^m. COBBETT.

• • For the use of persons possessing the Numbers of Volume 32, the *Title-page* and *Table of Contents* are given in the inside fold of this Number, and may be conveniently cut out for the purpose of binding up with the Volume.

Entered at Stationers' Hall.

Printed and Published by and for W^m. JACKSON, No. 11, Newcastle Street, and 192, Strand.